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'Just One Of Those Deals'

Bland never imagined he'd be dealing with the same injury two years later

Mike BABCOCK

HE MAINTAINS A LOW PROFILE as he leaves practice each day, sometimes with his teammates and sometimes not, walking away as the post-practice stretching or running begins.

He is reluctant to be interviewed, though he has always been out-going, engaging, someone to whom reporters have been drawn because of his willingness to share his thoughts, and his ability to articulate them. But his situation has changed, and he doesn't want what he says to be misconstrued.

He's not looking for attention, doesn't want it, not when he can't be on the field, contributing. And he hasn't been able to contribute since the fourth game of the season, at Southern Mississippi.

Such has been Philip Bland's lot in football life since the third quarter of that game. He re-injured the ankle on which he had surgery two years ago and has been forced to watch from the sideline.

As the Cornhuskers prepared for Colorado, he prepared for another ankle surgery. The surgery would be his third in three years at Nebraska. Last winter, a shoulder had to be reconstructed.

The rehabilitation of the shoulder sidelined him during spring practice.

"It's just one of those deals, a bum ankle," Bland said after a practice the week before the Colorado game, which would have been a homecoming — he played at Boulder's Fairview High. He missed playing at Folsom Field two years ago because of the injury that required the first surgery.

His playing wouldn't have changed the outcome. But at least he could have tried.

Bland never imagined that he would be dealing with the same injury now. As a high school senior, he suffered a broken hand. But he was able to play with the hand in a cast, seven games.

This is different. "I try my best to handle it, handle it with myself and with the people close to me, my family," he said. "I try not to make too big of a deal out of it, try to stay focused."

But that's not easy when you're 20-years-old and an athlete, capable of competing at such a high level. Bland's ability is such that he wasn't redshirted, playing in 10 games, including three starts, as a freshman. And he started 13 games last season, rotating between rover and free safety.

Philip Bland was third on the team in tackles last season as a sophomore.

He missed the Independence Bowl because of a hamstring injury, finishing third on the team in tackles, with 84, and earning All-Big 12 honorable mention from the conference coaches.

With the reconstructed shoulder and repaired ankle, he figured in defensive coordinator Bo Pelini's plans this season. Pelini referred to him as "my man Bland" before he ever got on the field.

Bland began the season as the starting strong safety, and though tradition has it that a starter doesn't lose his position because of injury, he'll face a stiff challenge when he returns. Sophomore Daniel Bullocks has played well. He was fourth on the team in tackles going into the Colorado game.

But he can't worry about losing his starting position, Bland said. "To be honest, at this level, you've never secured a spot. I think anyone will tell you if you're not playing up to how well you can be, then that spot's not going to be yours. It's tough to come back from injury and get a spot back.

"But it's definitely something you can't get hung up on, that's for sure."

Bland was optimistic about his junior season, "feeling pretty darn good and our team was playing well," he said. "When something like this comes along, it's pretty discouraging."

Finding something positive about where he finds himself is difficult, if not impossible.

"You learn more about the game, that's for sure. I've never had the chance for the majority of the season to just sit back and try to learn as much as I can," he said.

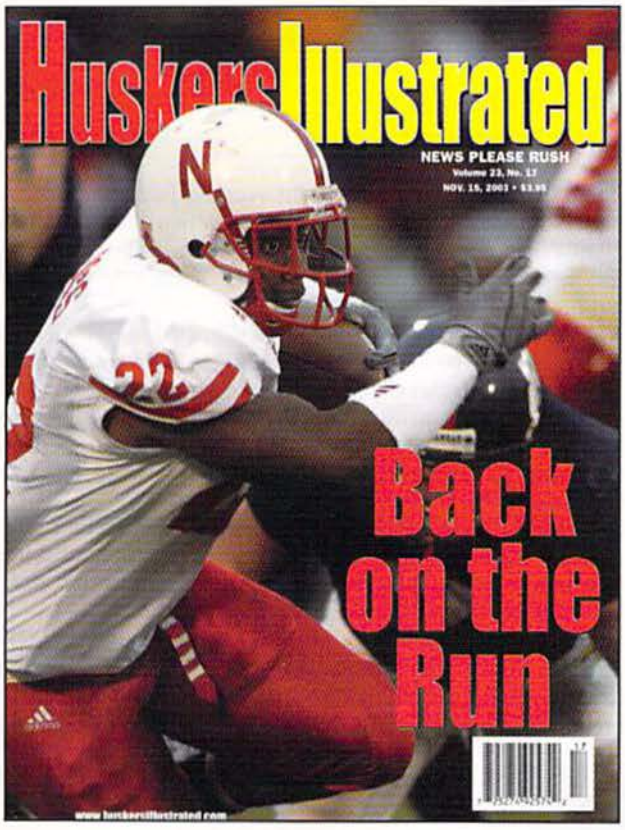
Given a choice, he would rather not have had that "chance," of course. It was thrust upon him. "It's one of those things where you kind of learn by doing up until you have to watch from afar," said Bland. "I try to learn stuff I wouldn't be able to learn otherwise."

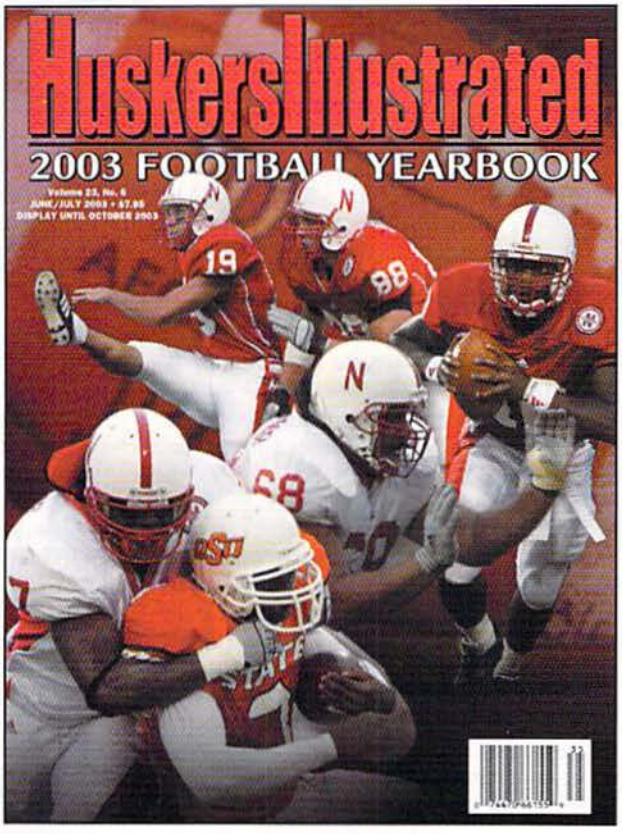
Some in his situation would have withdrawn completely, avoiding practice in an attempt to avoid the frustration of not being involved physically. For him, however, "it would be harder sitting at home, with my teammates out here working," he said. "I try my best, try to stay involved.

"I don't think it would be any easier saying, 'Forget this, I'll see you next year.' " ■

***Mike Babcock** is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years. Mike can be reached at MBABCOCK1@neb.rr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.*

Happy Holidays . . .





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. . . And Best Wishes in 2004

Among the young players contributing on offense are (from left) redshirt freshman wide receiver Isaiah Fluellen (28), sophomore wide receiver Mark LeFlore (10), sophomore tackle Richie Incognito (51), sophomore wide receiver Ross Pilkington (2), freshman quarterback Joe Dailey (12) and sophomore tight end Matt Herian (11). (PHOTOS BY SCOTT BRUHN)

Young

Tight end Herian, young teammates basis for optimism

By Mike Babcock

The anonymity Matt Herian enjoyed as a freshman has all but eroded this season. When he has been on the field, he has heard opposing coaches warning the defense to "watch the tight end." And, he says with characteristic modesty, he has noticed "a little more defensive coverage my way."

A little more? Nebraska's sophomore tight end has been a focus of opposing defenses because of his remarkable success running open on play-action passes. Some teams have been "more worried about it than others," he says. "You can tell because they never let me get behind them once.

"Then there were some teams where I got behind them three or four times a game."

Quarterback Jammal Lord wasn't always able to get him the ball. But he was open, nonetheless.

Even after that freshman season, in which he averaged 43 yards on seven receptions and scored four touchdowns, "he still gets open," says tight ends coach Scott Downing.

"He's an explosive football player. He's a big-time threat as a tight end."

And he still has two seasons of eligibility remaining.

Herian, a semifinalist for the John Mackey Award as the nation's top collegiate tight end, is among several young players who are the basis for optimism in the immediate future.

In fact, Nebraska has fielded what might have been its youngest team in recent history this season. The pre-Colorado depth chart included 24 freshmen and sophomores among the 58 listed on offense and defense, plus place-kicker David Dyches and back-up punter Sam Koch.

In addition, true freshmen Andy

Young players contributing on defense and special teams include (from left) sophomore cornerback Fabian Washington (3), sophomore defensive end Titus Adams (96), sophomore strong safety Daniel Bullocks (14), freshman kicker David Dyches (27), sophomore free safety Josh Bullocks (20) and sophomore defensive tackle Le Kevin Smith (66).

Guns

Feature Story

Birkel and Greg Austin have been sidelined by injury, as has Ryan Schuler, an offensive lineman who would have played if not for a blood-clot problem.

Nine of the youngsters were listed as starters for the Colorado game, including Herian, who is better now than when the season began — and he was very good then, as a deep receiver. "I think the difference in Matt is, he feels a lot more comfortable in the offense," says Downing.

As a freshman, he played "in certain situations and ran certain plays," Downing says. "Early this year, he was still learning to do everything we're asking our tight ends to do."

That includes blocking and pass protection, of course, as well as route running.

As the season wound down, Downing saw "his level of play pick up because I think he's comfortable with doing the entire offense." He was able to stop thinking and start playing.

"He's become a more confident player through the last half of the season," Downing says. "He was always confident on pass receiving." Now, that confidence also extends to his blocking.

"He's picked up a lot of confidence over the last few weeks," says Downing.

Going into the Colorado game, Herian had caught 20 passes for 420 yards and two touchdowns. All three were team highs. With two more receptions, his total would be the most by a Cornhusker tight end since 1991, when Johnny Mitchell caught 31 passes, a school-position record.

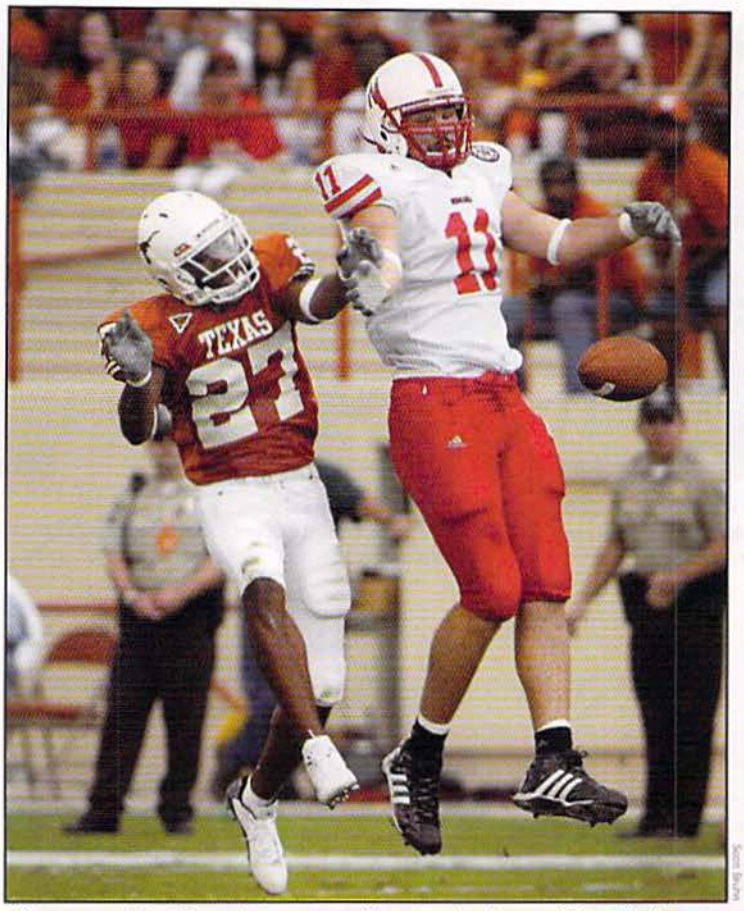
Even though his per-catch average is half of what it was last season, it still reflects his uncanny ability to get open. And he has complemented that by being patient on shorter routes.

The patience is "one of the main things I had to learn," says Herian. "Everybody wants to go deep every play. You have to be more patient with the shorter routes, just get open on those shorter routes and be able to read defenses. Everything is coming along a lot better this year.

"Everybody asks me, 'Why don't you go deep?' It's not going to work on every play."

He can't be a receiver on every play, either, given Nebraska's commitment to the run. He has played a more significant role in the running game, as a blocker. For one thing, he's heavier than last season, at 235 pounds. And for another, he has become more polished in his blocking technique.

With the added weight, "when I lock up with somebody, I just feel like there's more there," he says. "I feel a lot more power, whatever you want to call it, when I block.



After averaging 43 yards per reception as a freshman, Matt Herian (11) has drawn more attention from opposing defenses this season.

"Everybody wants to go deep every play. You have to be more patient with the shorter routes, just get open on those shorter routes and be able to read defenses. Everybody asks me, 'Why don't you go deep?' It's not going to work on every play."

— Sophomore tight end Matt Herian

"Working in the weight room all winter and summer, that helps."

Herian knew he would have to improve as a blocker if he wanted to get on the field more. "I couldn't just come in and run pass routes like I did as a freshman because defenses key in on that real easily," he said. "I knew I had to become a blocking threat, too, just to keep defenses honest."

His increased confidence has been a factor as a blocker, too, according to Downing. "I think my blocking game has come along a lot, a little faster than I thought it would," says Herian.

But, he adds, "There's always room for improvement."

Typically, players make marked improvement from their first season to their second, and that's been the case for him. As a freshman, even if he was on the field for a running play, chances are, he would be blocking on the backside. "It was rare if I was on the front side of a play," he says.

This season, however, the Cornhuskers have "changed it up." Sometimes, senior Phil Peetz has been on the front side and sometimes on the backside, with "me on the front side," Herian says.

He has been "on the front side of the play a lot."

Despite being just a sophomore, Herian has assumed a leadership role among the tight ends and receivers, the youngest position area on the team. The top three wide receivers in catches are sophomores Ross Pilkington and Mark LeFlore and redshirted freshman Isaiah Fluellen.

" They're very young, but we really don't consider them young anymore," offensive coordinator Barney Cotton said recently. "They're all veteran guys now. They've all played a number of snaps. I really think they've come a long way, and we're pleased with their progress. I think they have met our expectations as far as being physical and also being good route runners."

In addition, they have shown they can run with the ball after they get it," said Cotton.

Herian has shown those things, too. During practice, he has worked not only with the tight ends but also with the wide receivers, improving in all facets of the game. He has done so with the maturity of an older player. "He doesn't have extreme highs and extreme lows," Downing says.

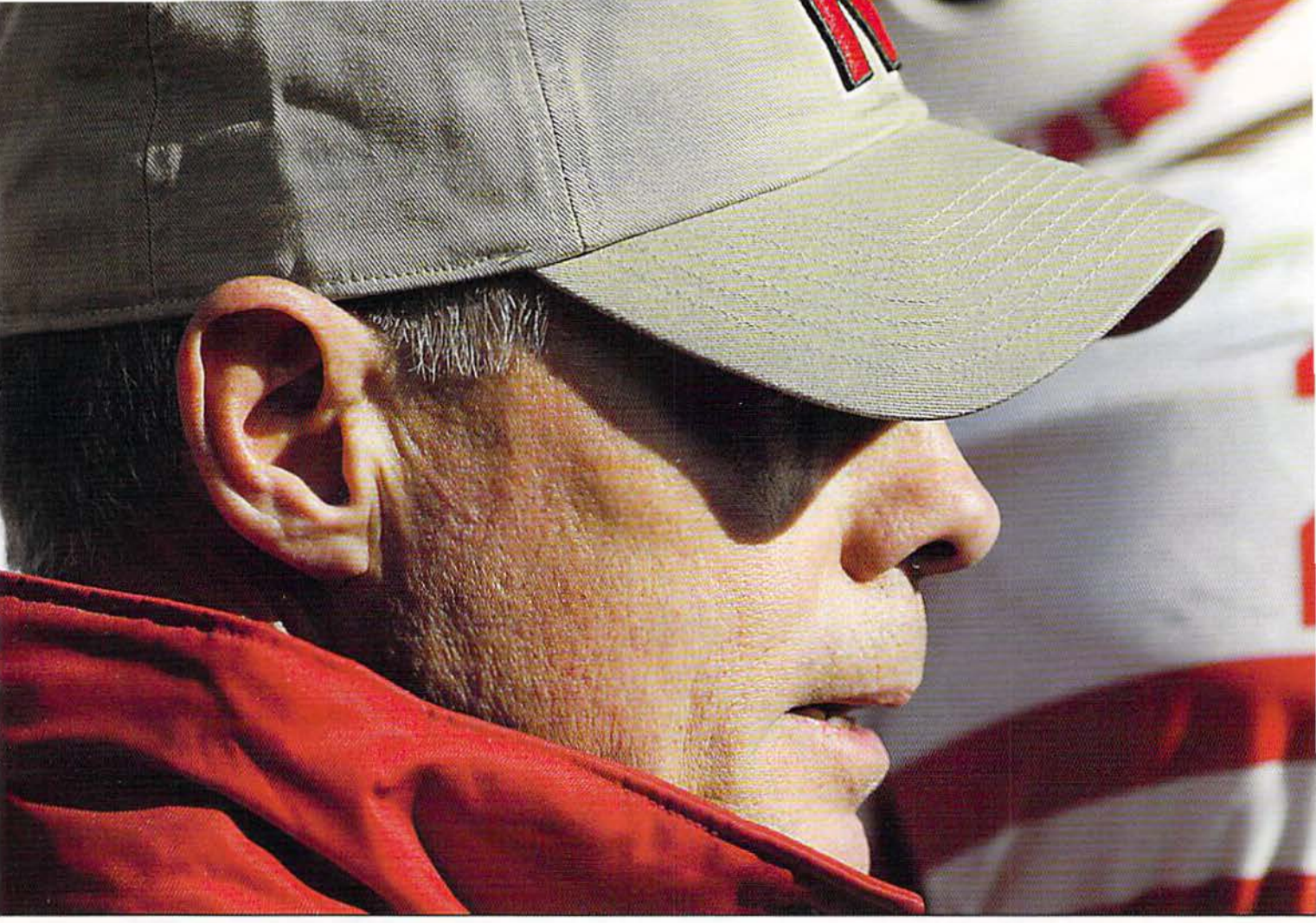
However, "he's really hard on himself. He's not too far up and not too far down. But I can tell you this, if he misses a block or he drops a pass, he is very, very hard on himself.

"That's what makes him good. He has high standards that he holds himself to that I don't think he verbalizes to everybody else. He doesn't set his goal on a pedestal for everybody else to see.

"He's got certain goals he wants to accomplish and when he falls short, he gets mad at himself. But he's not the type of guy to over-react or show an over-amount of emotion.

"That lends itself to the fact that he's a pretty consistent football player."

And it has taken away the relative anonymity of last season. ■



9-3-Out

AD Pederson says he refuses to 'let program gravitate to mediocrity'

By Mike Babcock

When Frank Solich met with reporters following the Colorado game, he was asked if Nebraska's 9-3 record would be enough to keep his job. Surely, it would be wouldn't it?

Solich, who seemed as relaxed as he had been in some time, took no offense.

"I'm ready to get back to work on Monday with our players," he replied. "We're going to meet at 2 (p.m.), and that's the only direction I'm going until someone tells me differently."

Just over 24 hours later, in a brief meeting at the South Stadium, Athletic Director Steve

Frank Solich answers questions from the media after being announced as Tom Osborne's replacement on Dec. 10, 1997.

Pederson told him differently. After what some suggested was a defining victory in his six-year career as the Cornhuskers' head coach, Solich was told he was being dismissed.

The dismissal was made official the next afternoon, during a packed news conference on the sixth level of the skybox structure at Memorial Stadium. "Today, I have asked Frank Solich to step down as the head football coach at Nebraska, effective immediately," Pederson said.

With those words, Solich's 30-year association with the football program ended.

Defensive coordinator Bo Pelini would take his place for a bowl game, serving as interim head coach.

And an "open," national search for Solich's successor would begin immediately. "We'll move as quickly and as prudently as possible in making this decision," said Pederson.

Pelini would be among the candidates, he said, as would assistant head coach Turner Gill.

Given his title, Gill logically would have been next in line to replace Solich on an interim basis. But "as I looked at where we were right now and what I thought could happen over the next month to put our players in a position to be successful in a bowl game," Pelini was the choice, Pederson said.

However, "I don't want anybody to read anything into" Pelini's promotion.

"I made no commitments to Bo. Bo made no commitments to me," he said. "I feel like right now, in an unusual situation, that Bo will do an excellent job of handling this program."

All of the assistants will coach through the bowl game. After that, however, there are no guarantees. "The new coach will have the opportunity to hire any staff members he wants," said Pederson. "I would encourage a new coach to interview all the people on the current staff.

"But the decision to retain or not to retain anybody would be theirs."

Pelini was among six new full-time assistants hired following last season's 7-7 record.

Wins and losses weren't the determining factor in the decision to relieve Solich of his duties, however, according to Pederson, who had remained silent on the matter despite rampant rumors driven by the Internet and given credibility by a story in the previous Sunday's Lincoln Journal Star quoting anonymous boosters as saying Pederson would try to persuade Solich to step aside.

Solich indicated early in the week before the Colorado game that he had no intention of resigning, and he reiterated that during the post-game interview. "Resigning? No. I could go through a list of reasons why I would not do that, but I won't take your time on it," he said. "I don't plan on resigning."

Pederson said he did not offer Solich another position in the athletic department.

Solich's contract runs through June 30, 2006. So he will receive his base for 31 months plus an additional month's base pay as a bowl-game bonus, a total of $786,693.

Nebraska will be playing in a 35th consecutive bowl game, as yet undetermined. Speculation after the Colorado game centered on the Holiday Bowl in San Diego on Dec. 30.

Given the Cornhuskers' record this season and the impending bowl trip, Pederson said that he was certain there would be questions about his decision to replace Solich.

"But this was not a decision, as I said all along, that would be determined by wins and losses," he said. "It was a decision based on the overall direction of the program and where I see our program headed in the next five to 10 years. I refuse to let this program gravitate to mediocrity.

"I think if you evaluate a program, you have to look at the program in total. If you simply look at wins and losses, then all you have to do is show up for the last game and pronounce it

Defensive coordinator Bo Pelini, congratulating Pat Ricketts after the senior cornerback's clinching interception in the win over Colorado, was named interim head coach.

a successful or unsuccessful season. And that's not how you evaluate your program."

A program must be evaluated on recruiting success, leadership and coaching, he said. "And when you make that overall evaluation, you have to decide where you see the program headed."

That the assistants and players learned of Solich's dismissal through media reports was unfortunate, according to Pederson. "I hate the fact that we had to do it that way," he said. But "I couldn't find another way to do that without creating problems for everything else."

The assistant coaches were scheduled to leave on recruiting trips the day of the news conference and "I did not want them to get out on the road and then have to come back in, so that they were away from our players at a time when I know our players are going to need them," said Pederson.

He didn't wait until after the bowl game to make the decision because of the "media firestorm that surrounded the speculation and really left me no option but to address it," he said.

"To leave our athletes and coaches guessing and wondering on speculation serves no positive purpose, and I think could damage our program. It's time for our program and our state to come together."

Nebraska Chancellor Harvey Perlman preceded Pederson to the podium and offered his support of what had transpired. "When I interviewed Steve Pederson for the job of athletic director, we talked about the need to bring this football program back to where it had been," Perlman said.

"That was my expectation of him, and his expectation, that that would be a high priority issue for him if he assumed the role of athletic director. I have full confidence in his ability to do that."

After the Colorado game, Solich was asked if he would be coaching the team in a bowl.

"Well, I'd like to think so," he said. "I haven't had anybody tell me anything different and so it's business as usual for us. That's how I've looked at this."

A day later, it wasn't business as usual.

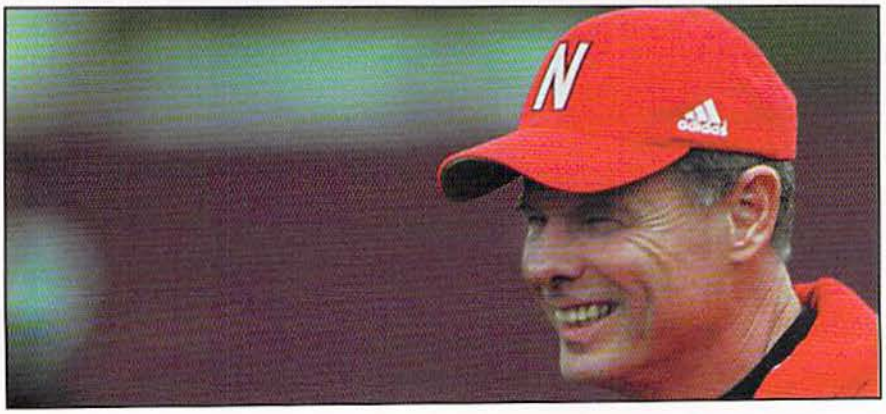
"I commend Frank Solich for his years of service to the University of Nebraska," said Pederson. "He has served this program well in various roles and certainly has a solid win-loss record. He deserves the admiration and support from all of us who care about Nebraska football.

"I thank him for his contributions."

With that, the Solich era ended. ■

Record Year-By Year Under Frank Solich

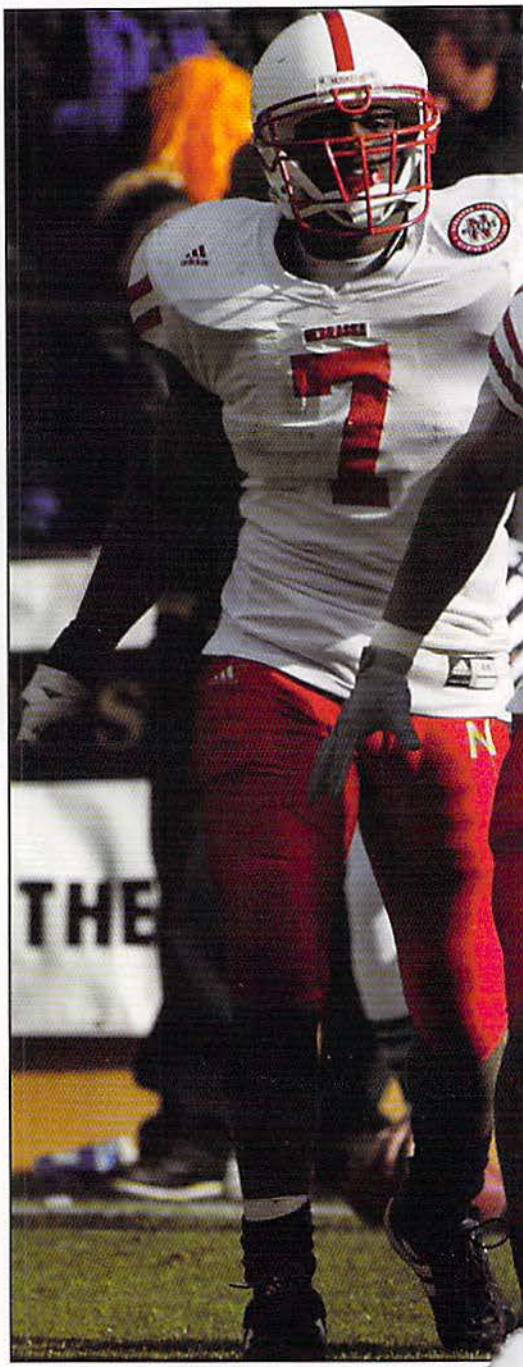
	Conf.		All	
1998	5	3	9	4
99	7	1	12	1
	6	2	10	2
	7	1	11	2
	3	5	7	7
	5	3	9	3
	33	15	58	19



Unexpect

Huskers stay strong for their coaches in 31-22 victory

By Mike Babcock
Photos by Scott Bruhn



Game Story

The irony was as substantial as the Gatorade the players poured on Frank Solich in celebration of Nebraska's 31-22 victory at Colorado on the day after Thanksgiving.

No one imagined it would be Solich's final game as coach.

He left the field to the cheers of Cornhusker fans in the southeast corner of Folsom Field and came away with the passionate support of those who played for him.

In the locker room afterward, "I told Coach Solich I love him because he's been there for us all my four years at Nebraska," said Buck linebacker T.J. Hollowell.

Whatever his detractors might say, "he's a great coach," Hollowell said. "I told him, hey, everything we did up to this point was for him. I know he's been going through a lot this last week. We just tried to push that aside, just come out with this win for ourselves and Coach Solich."

The players presented game balls to Solich and secondary coach Marvin Sanders, who arrived in Boulder on Thanksgiving night, after attending his mom's funeral in Atlanta the day before.

Sanders "came back with the team," said Hollowell. "He stayed strong with us."

The Cornhuskers stayed strong for their coaches, responding in the face of adversity on the field as well as off. Twice they fell behind against a resurgent Colorado team that had much to play for besides final-game pride, including a .500 record, and with it bowl-game eligibility.

The Buffaloes had won their last two games and had played better against top-ranked Oklahoma than anyone else, in a 34-20 loss. They were "at their best," Solich said. And when they drove 58 yards on seven plays to take a 22-21 lead early in the third quarter, Nebraska had reason for concern.

The second half was the Cornhuskers' downfall in all three of their losses.

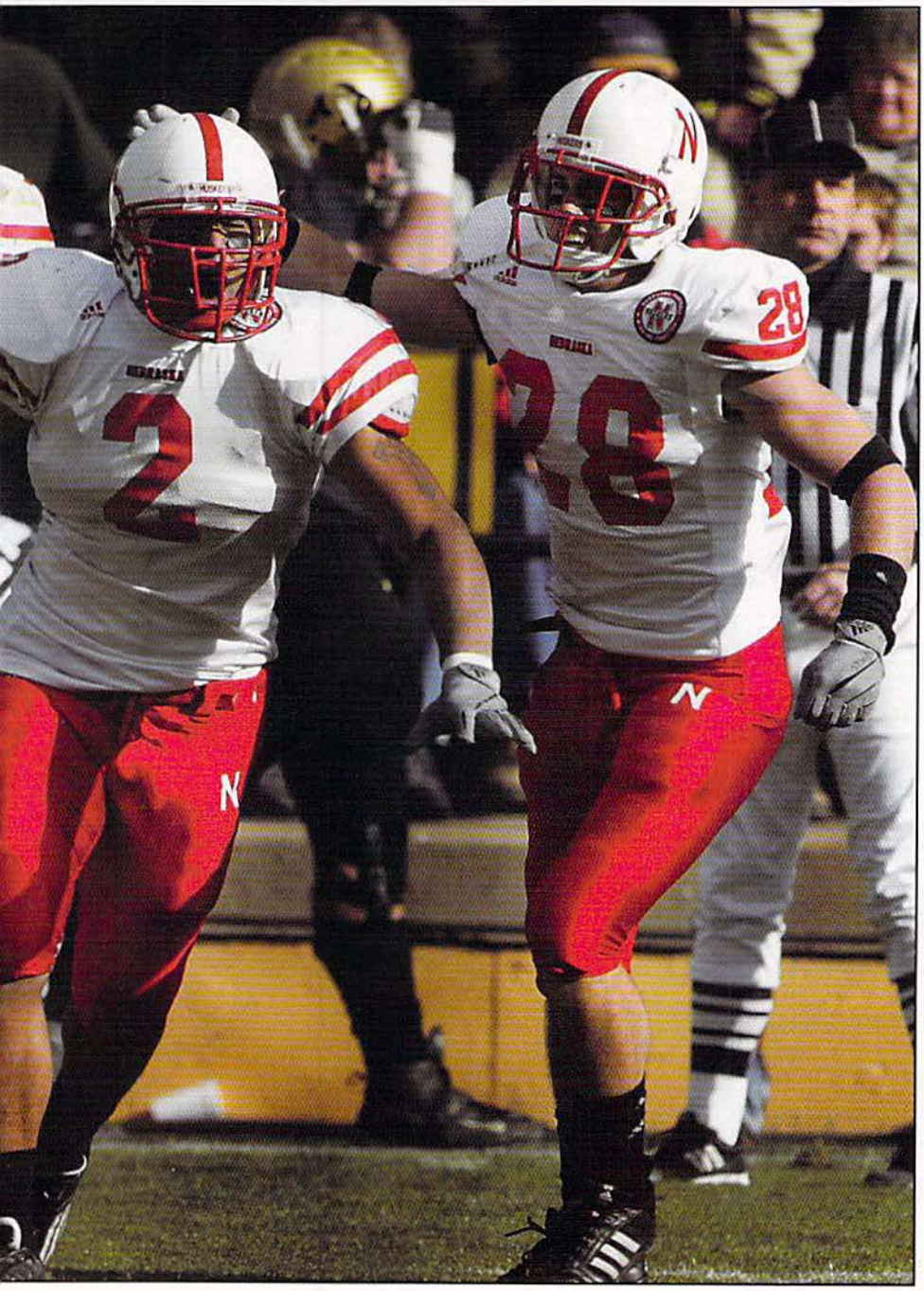
That Colorado was in position to go ahead was part of the concern. The Buffaloes scored with 49 seconds left in the first half, after recovering a blocked punt at the Nebraska 8-yard line.

Pessimistic fans could see the game slipping away. But it didn't.

The Cornhuskers regained the lead on a 19-yard David Dyches field goal, following a 4-yard punt that gave them the ball at their own 40-yard line. Then they settled the issue with a Judd Davies touchdown, following a Hollowell pass interce[pt] and 25-yard return to the Col[o] 6-yard line.

Davies' touchdown, from less than a yard, came on fourth down, the third on which Nebraska converted. The second came during the

ted Irony



Linebackers Demorrio Williams (7) and T.J. Hollowell (2) and cornerback Pat Ricketts (28) celebrate after Hollowell's interception and 25-yard return that set up the clinching touchdown in the fourth quarter.

58-yard drive to Dyches' field goal. And the first came in the second quarter, when holder Kellen Huston ran 15 yards on a fake field-goal attempt.

The Cornhuskers faced fourth-and-7, leading 14-10.

"There wasn't any hesitation on that," Solich said of the fake field goal, even though the play clock nearly expired before the ball was snapped. "We almost caught ourselves short there.

"But the idea was to fake it from the start."

Such imagination characterized Nebraska's play-calling, which included two alignments with quarterbacks Jammal Lord and Joe Dailey on the field at the same time.

And it was imagination rather than risk-taking, according to Solich. He didn't take more chances against Colorado, he said, even though "it will be probably perceived that way.

"But it seemed like the right thing to do at the time . . . and that's basically, I think, what my decisions have been based on, what's going to give us our best chance to win a game.

"Sometimes it may not be pretty. Sometimes it may not be in the style or manner that everybody likes. But the bottom line is, you're trying to get wins for your players, for your coaches, for your program, and you make calls that sometimes give you your best chance."

Nebraska's first touchdown came on a play that shouldn't have surprised anyone, a play-action pass from Lord to tight end Matt Herian, for 58 yards and a 7-0 lead less than 5 minutes into the game.

After Colorado went ahead 10-7, on a 44-yard field goal, Josh Davis returned the ensuing kickoff 64 yards, and the Buffaloes contributed 15 more yards because of a facemask penalty.

Three plays later, Lord scored from 5 yards out to make the score 14-10, Nebraska.

"I think Coach (Barney) Cotton did a great job again of calling the game," Solich said of his offensive coordinator. "He gave us an opportunity to get some big plays."

And "our players stepped up and made them," said Solich.

GAME NOTES

Notes And Quotes From The Colorado Game

VICTORY GUARANTEED

On the night before the game, senior weakside linebacker Demorrio Williams announced he was guaranteeing a Nebraska victory. And the rest of the defense stood behind that, according to senior Buck linebacker T.J.Hollowell. "We're all competitors," said Hollowell. "We're up to it."

Unofficially, Williams was credited with eight tackles, including a 10-yard sack and a pass breakup on one of Colorado's two-point conversion attempts.

Hollowell was credited with seven tackles.

Junior middle linebacker Barrett Ruud was credited with 16 tackles, which would move him from sixth to second on the Cornhuskers' all-time season-tackles list with 140. It was his seventh consecutive double-figure-tackle game.

The 16 tackles also would move his career total from sixth to third.

SAW IT COMING

Hollowell's interception to set up Nebraska's final touchdown was a result of recognition and anticipation. "It was a route they were running all day. They just weren't throwing it over to my side. I knew once the quarterback looked over there and he was going to throw it I was going to have a good chance to break on it pretty good," he said. "I took a chance and did that.

"I was just happy to make a play for my team."

Cornerback Pat Ricketts also intercepted a pass to end the Buffaloes' comeback hopes, with 1:58 remaining. Quarterback Joel Klatt completed 26-of-44 for 269 yards and three touchdowns.

PUTTING IT ON THE LINE

The coaches had to do some shuffling in the offensive line because of injuries. Sophomore walk-on Brandon Koch got his first career start at right guard because junior Jake Andersen was slowed by a toe injury. Anderson played but didn't make it through the game.

Sophomore left tackle Richie Incognito also was slowed by injury and "got banged up a little bit" (Incognito's words) during the game. As a result, he was forced to miss some snaps.

"We had something to prove today, and we got it done," Incognito said. "They had nothing to lose, and we kind of played like we had nothing to lose. It was a great win." That the win was the Cornhuskers' ninth of the season was "a big thing," he said.

HAPPY HOMECOMING

Sophomore I-back Cory Ross was the game's leading rusher, with 103 yards on 22 carries. He scored the touchdown, from 2 yards out, set up by Kellen Huston's 15-yard run on a fake field goal.

Ross is from Denver, one of 10 players from Colorado on Nebraska's roster.

"It felt great," he said. "I watched games in this stadium (growing up)."

The Cornhuskers played with energy and enthusiasm, reflecting how they had practiced. "We knew coming into this game we'd better be ready to play," said Ross. "We practiced harder than we probably had in a couple of years. We had energy probably the whole week of practice."

Nebraska rushed for 223 yards, averaging just under 4 yards per carry.

YARDS AND YARDS AND YARDS

Cornhusker quarterback Jammal Lord rushed for 68 yards and one touchdown and completed 8-of-18 passes for 146 yards and one touchdown, with no interceptions. Lord's 214 yards of total offense moved him to fourth on Nebraska's career list — 5,182 yards.

Only four other Cornhuskers have totaled 5,000 career yards, passing and rushing: Eric Crouch (7,915), Tommie Frazier (5,476), Jerry Tagge (5,283) and Dave Humm (5,027).

However, the statistics are "neither here nor three," said Lord. "I'm just worried about this win."

Nebraska mixed passing and running. "Our coaches had a great game plan," he said. "They told me it would be a little bit more balanced than it usually would be. Well, all right, bring it on."

HOLIDAY BOUND

Holiday Bowl representatives were on hand, fueling speculation that the Cornhuskers could be headed for a Dec. 30 game in San Diego, against an opponent from the Pac-10.

Nebraska lost to Arizona in the 1998 Holiday Bowl game.

The Holiday Bowl would be "a lot better" than last year's trip to the Independence Bowl, according to sophomore tight end Matt Herian. "A lot of people say there are a lot more things to do (in San Diego). There are beaches. Everybody wanted to go to a better place and kind of used that as motivation." ■

I-back Cory Ross celebrates after his touchdown run in the second quarter.

The Cornhuskers made them on both sides of the ball.

"It was not a usual two weeks for them, or anybody involved with the program," Solich said. "But they did a great job of staying focused, overcoming what they had to overcome."

They did it for Solich, junior defensive end Benard Thomas told reporters as he left the field.

"Well, that means everything, of course, because they're what you're in the game for. Your dealings with them on a day-to-day basis, school, their personal lives, football, that's why you're in this business," said Solich. "And for them to care, that means a great deal."

Lord cared, telling reporters to "just leave Coach Solich alone and let him do his job."

As it turned out, his remark was fraught with unexpected irony.

Two days later, the job was no longer his. ■

Game Stats

Nebraska Vs. Colorado

Nov. 28, 2003 • Folsom Field • Boulder, Colo.

Score By Quarters

Nebraska	**7**	**14**	**0**	**10**	**—**	**31**
Colorado	**7**	**9**	**6**	**0**	**—**	**22**

Team Stats

	NU	CU
First Downs	18	19
Rushing	12	4
Passing	6	14
Penalty	0	1
Rushing Attempts	59	31
Yards Gained Rushing	232	93
Yards Lost Rushing	9	29
Net Yards Rushing	223	64
Net Yards Passing	146	269
Passes Attempted	18	44
Passes Completed	8	26
Had Intercepted	0	2
Total Plays	77	74
Total Net Yards	369	333
Avg. Gain Per Play	4.8	4.5
Fumbles-Lost	1-0	0-0
Penalties-Yards	5-45	7-60
Punts-Yards	4-119	6-267
Avg. Per Punt	29.8	44.5
Punt Returns-Yards	1-12	2-22
Interceptions-Yards	2-26	0-0
Fumble Returns-Yards	0-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns-Yards	1-64	1-9
Possession Time	30:50	29:10

Scoring

NU — Matt Herian 58-yard pass from Jammal Lord (David Dyches kick)

CU — D.J. Hackett 33-yard pass from Joel Klatt (Mason Crosby kick)

CU — Crosby 44-yard field goal

NU — Lord 5-yard run (Dyches kick)

NU — Cory Ross 2-yard run (Dyches kick)

CU — Hackett 6-yard pass from Klatt (pass failed)

CU — Derek McCoy 31-yard pass from Klatt (pass failed)

NU — Dyches 19-yard field goal

NU — Judd Davies 1-yard run (Dyches kick)

Att. — 53,444

Weather — partly cloudy

Temp. — 31

Individual Statistics

NEBRASKA

RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Ross, C.	22	103	4.7	23	1
Lord, J.	21	68	3.2	13	1
Davis, J.	4	20	5.0	8	0
Davies, J.	6	18	3.0	8	1
Huston, K.	1	15	15.0	15	0
Kriewald, S.	2	7	3.5	4	0
Team	2	3	-1.5	0	0
Horne, D.	1	-5	-5.0	0	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Lord, J.	8-18-0	44.4	146	1

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Herian, M.	2	64	32.0	58	1
LeFlore, M.	2	29	14.5	21	0
Pilkington, R.	2	28	14.0	19	0
Fluellen, I.	1	16	16.0	16	0
Liley, T.	1	9	9.0	9	0

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG	I20
Larson, K.	3	119	39.7	56	0
Team	1	0	0.0	0	0

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Davis, J.	1	12	12.0	12	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Davis, J.	1	64	64.0	64	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	Att.	Good	Long
Dyches, D.	1	1	19

DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Ruud, B.	12	4	16	1-2	0	0
Williams, D.	4	4	8	1-10	0	1-10
Hollowell, T.	5	2	7	0	1-25	0
Bullocks, D.	5	1	6	0	0	0
Bingham, R.	4	2	6	0	0	0
Washington, F.	3	0	3	0	0	0
Johnson, T.	2	1	3	0	0	0
Pippens, J.	2	0	2	0	0	0
Teamer, B.	2	0	2	0	0	0
Thomas, B.	1	1	2	1-4	0	0
Smith, L.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Bullocks, J.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Ricketts, P.	1	0	1	0	1-1	0
Carriker, A.	1	0	1	1-9	0	1-9
McPherson, L.	1	0	1	0	0	0
Adams, T.	1	0	1	0	0	0

COLORADO

RUSHING

Name	Att.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Calhoun, B.	13	49	3.8	9	0
Jolly, D.	7	12	1.7	9	0
Vickers, L.	3	9	3.0	9	0
Bloom, J.	1	4	4.0	4	0
Klatt, J.	7	-10	-1.4	5	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Klatt, J.	26-44-2	59.1	269	3

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Hackett, D.	9	94	10.4	33	2
Calhoun, B.	6	42	7.0	13	0
McCoy, D.	3	51	17.0	31	1
Bloom, J.	3	33	11.0	13	0
Wallace, J.	2	14	7.0	10	0
Klopfensetin, J.	2	14	7.0	8	0
Donohoe, J.	1	21	21.0	21	0

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG	I20
Torp, J.	6	267	44.5	69	2

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Bloom, J.	1	13	13.0	13	0
Hackett, D.	1	9	9.0	9	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Bloom, J.	1	9	9.0	9	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	Att.	Good	Long
Crosby, M.	1	1	44

DEFENSE LEADERS

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Tufts, S.	10	5	15	0	0	0
Dabdoub, B.	7	4	11	0	0	0
Billingsley, J.	6	5	11	0	0	0
Moorer, M.	7	2	9	0	0	0
Joseph, S.	3	5	8	0	0	0
McChesney, M.	3	3	6	1-1	0	0
Nyenhuis, G.	6	0	6	0	0	0
Surrell, C.	5	0	5	0	0	0
Dawn, A.	4	1	5	0	0	0

2003 Season Stats

RUSHING

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	TD
Lord, J.	12	205	869	72.4	10
Davis, J.	12	138	600	50.0	2
Horne, D.	12	107	441	36.8	4
Ross, C.	12	93	437	36.4	2
Dailey, J.	8	33	122	15.3	0
Fluellen, I.	10	11	113	11.3	1
Kriewald, S.	12	17	89	7.4	1
Davies, J.	12	31	85	7.1	5
Miller, R.	6	10	65	10.8	1
LeFlore, M.	12	2	21	1.8	0
Huston, K.	10	1	15	1.5	0
Todd, D.	5	3	6	1.2	0
Grixby, D.	2	1	1	0.5	0
Wingender, A.	5	1	-1	-1.0	0

PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Lord, J.	12	77-169-8	48.4	1,145	6
Dailey, J.	8	9-14-2	64.3	117	2

RECEIVING

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Herian, M.	12	22	484	22.0	40.3	3
Pilkington, R.	12	19	268	14.1	22.3	1
LeFlore, M.	12	19	197	10.4	16.4	2
Fluellen, I.	10	11	203	18.5	20.3	2
Davis, J.	12	4	21	5.2	1.8	0
Davies, J.	12	4	19	4.8	1.6	0
Ross, C.	12	2	36	18.0	3.0	0
Liley, T.	12	2	14	7.0	1.2	0
Keiser, D.	11	1	9	9.0	0.8	0
Kriewald, S.	12	1	6	6.0	0.5	0
Horne, D.	12	1	5	5.0	0.4	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Dyches, D.	11	19	13	41
DeAngelis, S.	6	3	1	28

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG	I20
Larson, K.	59	2,678	45.4	80	19

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Davis, J.	27	240	8.9	30	0
Ross, C.	6	62	10.3	30	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Davis, J.	23	596	25.9	64	0
O'Holleran, J.	2	27	13.5	21	0
Sievers, C.	1	8	8.0	8	0

DEFENSIVE LEADERS

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Ruud, B.	12	74	66	140	13-39	1-27	2.5-21
Williams, D.	12	77	44	121	17-74	1-2	9-65
Hollowell, T.	12	37	36	73	7-29	2-35	1.5-13
Bullocks, D.	12	43	25	68	4-5	1-11	0
Johnson, T.	12	32	30	62	7-23	0	2-15
Washington, F.	12	36	18	54	3-6	3-14	0
Bingham, R.	10	24	27	51	7-10	0	1-2
Pippens, J.	12	27	18	45	3-9	2-2	1-7
Bullocks, J.	12	20	24	44	0	10-154	0
Smith, L.	12	19	23	42	5-12	0	0
Thomas, B.	12	17	23	40	5-24	0	1-7
Kabongo, P.	12	12	23	35	2-1	0	0
Ricketts, P.	12	23	7	30	2-5	2-1	0
McPherson, L.	12	20	6	26	1-11	4-11	1-11
Adams, T.	12	11	15	26	0	2-0	0
Buller, C.	12	13	11	24	0	0	0
Sievers, C.	12	7	7	14	0	0	0
Teamer, B.	11	8	5	13	0	0	0
Cooper, I.	12	8	3	11	0	0	0
Shanle, A.	10	6	3	9	1-14	0	1-14
Siegel, S.	11	4	4	8	0	0	0
Bland, P.	5	4	3	7	1-3	0	0
Brungardt, M.	11	5	2	7	0	0	0
Thorne, F.	11	4	2	6	0	0	0
Bradley, S.	11	4	2	6	3-4	0	0
Tomasevicz, C.	9	1	3	4	0	0	0
Huston, K.	10	2	2	4	1-10	1-0	1-10
Keiser, D.	12	2	2	4	0	0	0
Amos, W.	4	3	1	4	0	0	0
Butler, T.	7	3	0	3	0	0	0
Carriker, A.	8	2	1	3	1-9	0	1-9
Helming, J.	3	2	0	2	0	0	0
Lohr, J.	4	0	2	2	1-1	0	0
Incognito, R.	12	2	0	2	0	0	0

TEAM STATISTICS

	NU	OPP
Total Offensive Yards	4,096	3,687
Plays	837	812
Average Per Play	4.9	4.5
Average Per Game	341.3	307.2
Net Rushing Yards	2,834	1,511
Attempts	662	421
TDs Rushing	26	13
Net Passing Yards	1,262	2,156
Completions	86	197
Average Per Pass	7.2	5.5
Average Per Catch	14.7	10.9
Average Per Game	105.2	179.7
TDs Passing	8	10
Sacks By-Yards	22-174	17-127
Fumbles-Lost	29-14	26-16
Penalties-Yards	81-641	77-616

Scoring	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	OT	TOT
NU	90	60	95	60	0	305
Opponents	45	43	22	75	0	185

Scouting Report

2003 Schedule

1	Aug. 30	Oklahoma St. (9-3), W 17-7	1-0
2	Sept. 6	Utah State (3-9), W 31-7	2-0
3	Sept. 13	Penn State (3-9), W 18-10	3-0
4	Sept. 25	@ Southern Miss (9-3), W 38-14	4-0
5	Oct. 4	Troy State (6-6) , W 30-0	5-0
6	Oct. 11	@ Missouri (8-4), L 41-24	5-1
7	Oct. 18	Texas A&M (4-8), W 48-12	6-1
8	Oct. 25	Iowa State (2-10), W 28-0	7-1
9	Nov. 1	@ Texas (10-2), L 31-7	7-2
10	Nov. 8	@ Kansas (6-6), W 24-3	8-2
11	Nov. 15	Kansas State (10-3), L 38-9	8-3
12	Nov. 28	@ Colorado (5-7), W 31-22	9-3
13		Bowl Game TBA	

Big 12 At A Glance

North	Conf.		All	
Kansas State	6	2	10	3
Nebraska	5	3	9	3
Missouri	4	4	8	4
Kansas	3	5	6	6
Colorado	3	5	5	7
Iowa State	0	8	2	10

South	Conf.		All	
Oklahoma	8	0	12	0
Texas	7	1	10	2
Oklahoma State	5	3	9	3
Texas Tech	4	4	7	5
Texas A&M	2	6	4	8
Baylor	1	7	3	9

Saturday, Nov. 22
Oklahoma State 38, Baylor 21
Kansas 36, Iowa State 7
Kansas State 24, Missouri 14
Oklahoma 56, Texas Tech 25

Friday, Nov. 28
Nebraska 31, Colorado 22
Texas 46, Texas A&M 15

Saturday, Nov. 29
Missouri 45, Iowa State 7

Saturday, Dec. 6
Big 12 Championship, Kansas City

Big 12 Championship Game Matchup

Dec. 6, 7 p.m., Kansas City, ABC

Kansas State (10-3)

Aug. 23	vs. California (KC), W 42-28
Aug. 30	Troy State, W 41-5
Sept. 6	McNeese State, W 55-14
Sept. 13	Massachusetts, W 38-7
Sept. 20	Marshall, L 27-20
Oct. 4	@ Texas, L 24-20
Oct. 11	@ Oklahoma State, L 38-34
Oct. 18	Colorado, W 49-20
Oct. 25	Kansas, W 42-6
Nov. 1	Baylor, W 38-10
Nov. 8	@ Iowa State, W 45-0
Nov. 15	@ Nebraska, W 38-9
Nov. 22	Missouri, W 24-14

Oklahoma (12-0)

Aug. 30	North Texas, W 37-3
Sept. 6	@ Alabama, W 20-13
Sept. 13	Fresno State, W 52-28
Sept. 20	UCLA, W 59-24
Oct. 4	@ Iowa State, W 53-7
Oct. 11	@ Texas, W 65-13
Oct. 18	Missouri, W 34-13
Oct. 25	@ Colorado, W 34-20
Nov. 1	Oklahoma State, W 52-9
Nov. 8	Texas A&M, W 77-0
Nov. 15	Baylor, W 41-3
Nov. 22	@ Texas Tech, W 56-25

Nebraska's Future Schedules

(subject to changes)

2004
(11th game TBA)

Sept. 11	Southern Miss
Sept. 18	@ Pittsburgh
Oct. 2	Kansas
Oct. 9	@ Texas Tech
Oct. 16	Baylor
Oct. 23	@ Kansas State
Oct. 30	Missouri
Nov. 6	@ Iowa State
Nov. 13	@ Oklahoma
Nov. 26/27	Colorado

2005
(10th, 11th games TBA)

Sept. 17	Pittsburgh
Oct. 1	Iowa State
Oct. 8	Texas Tech
Oct. 15	@ Baylor
Oct. 22	@ Missouri
Oct. 29	Oklahoma
Nov. 5	@ Kansas
Nov. 12	Kansas State
Nov. 25/26	@ Colorado

2006
(10th, 11th games TBA)

Sept. 16	@ USC
Sept. 30	Kansas
Oct. 7	@ Iowa State
Oct. 14	@ Kansas State
Oct. 21	Texas
Oct. 28	@ Oklahoma St.
Nov. 4	Missouri
Nov. 11	@ Texas A&M
Nov. 24/25	Colorado

2007
(10th, 11th games TBA)

Sept. 15	USC
Sept. 29	Iowa State
Oct. 6	@ Missouri
Oct. 13	Oklahoma State
Oct. 20	Texas A&M
Oct. 27	@ Texas
Nov. 3	@ Kansas
Nov. 10	Kansas State
Nov. 23/24	@ Colorado

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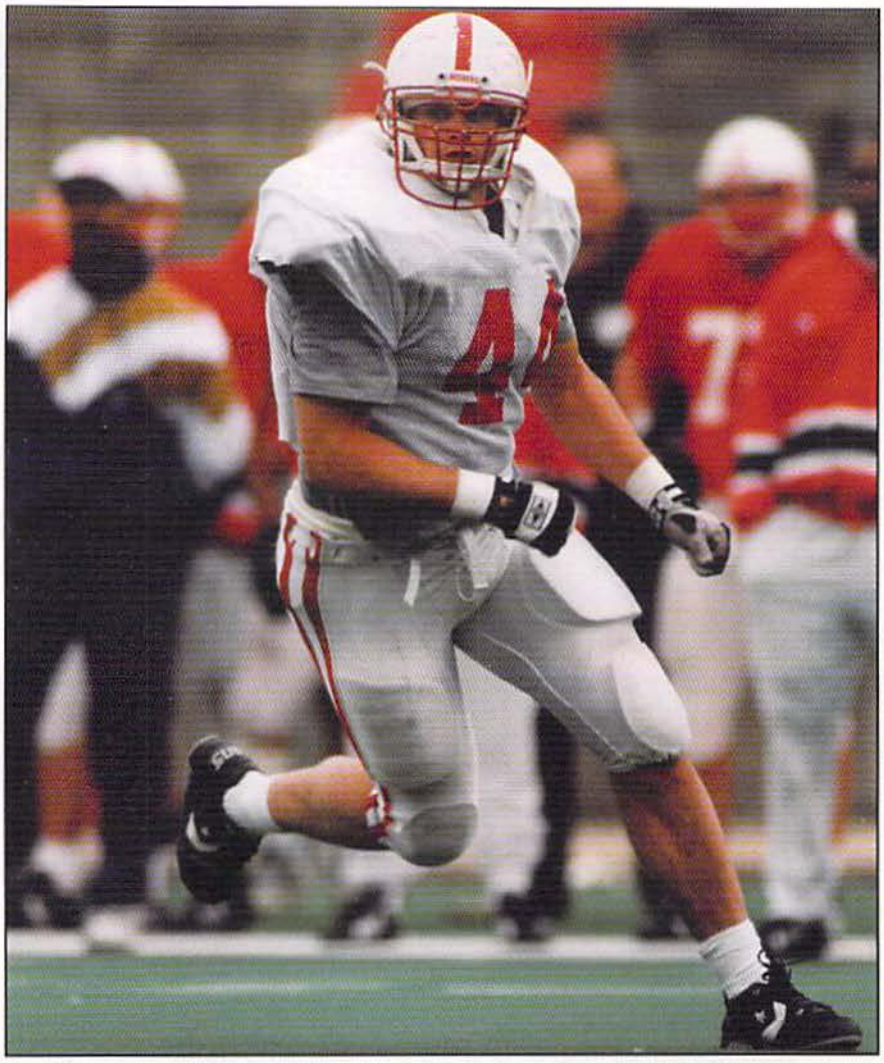
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Life Lessons

Hesse says he learned more than football from Osborne

By Mike Babcock



Jon Hesse was a first-team all-conference selection as a senior in 1996.

Jon Hesse was in the South Stadium elevator with Tom Osborne and a couple of other players, one of whom was a freshman walk-on whose name Hesse didn't know, and doesn't recall.

Osborne looked at one of the older players, who was wearing gold chains, and asked if he had enough gold. The others laughed. "Coach Osborne would mess with people," Hesse says. "He was like that when he was comfortable with guys. When you got older, he would rib you a little bit."

Then Osborne turned to the walk-on, from some small Nebraska community the name of which Hesse doesn't recall, and asked how he was doing. He called the walk-on by name and said he had seen that the walk-on's high school team had defeated its rival the previous Friday night.

"I thought then, 'That's why he's the man,' " says Hesse. "I had no idea who he was. But Coach Osborne did. Those things happened quite often. I learned a lot from being around him, what's important in life. I learned a lot of lessons from him. If you were paying attention, you could."

Hesse, who was always "pretty introspective," paid attention during his time at Nebraska, absorbing not only what he was taught about football but also what he was taught about life.

He learned that the two weren't exclusive of each other, that the principles could be the same and could lead to success in both areas. "A lot of people from those teams are going to be very successful individuals," says Hesse, who works for A.G. Edwards & Sons in Lincoln.

"There were a lot of guys who just got it, that it's great to be part of a team, that the more you put in, the more you get out, that you can prepare and still not control the outcome."

The chances of success are much greater with preparation and teamwork, however, as evidenced by the fact that Hesse has two national championship rings. "To me, winning was more important than great (personal) numbers," he says. And "I think there were more guys like me there at the time."

Mindset was an essential element of Nebraska's success during the three seasons in which he earned letters, 1994 through 1996. The Cornhuskers had a combined 36-2 record, with national titles in 1994 and 1995. And they set the foundation for a third national championship in 1997.

During his time "the players were pretty much self-monitoring," he says.

"The thing that happens in any culture is, you have a middle group of 60 to 80 percent who can go either way, a top level and a bottom level, guys who focus more on themselves.

"When I was at the university, the majority were getting sucked into, 'What can I do for this team? How can I contribute?' When you get that going, it takes care of itself."

Hesse contributed as a back-up to Phil Ellis and Doug Colman at middle linebacker as well as on special teams in 1994 and 1995 — finishing eighth

on the team in tackles during his junior season — and then earned first-team all-conference recognition as the starter in the middle in 1996.

He was a seventh-round pick of the Jacksonville Jaguars in the 1997 NFL draft and though he had "marginal skills for the NFL," football provided paychecks for the next three years.

Jacksonville released him at the end of training camp but the Green Bay Packers picked him up and he spent 15 weeks on their practice squad. Then he signed with the Denver Broncos — practice-squad players remain free agents — and spent the remainder of the season with them.

Though he didn't play, he earned a Super Bowl ring.

He went to training camp with the Broncos in 1998, was released and picked up by the Oakland Raiders, who kept him for two weeks before releasing him. No sooner had he returned to Denver, where his wife Amy had remained, than the St. Louis Rams called. So they moved again.

He played in his first NFL regular-season game with the Rams, on special teams against the Chicago Bears, and remained on the Rams' active roster for the rest of that season.

The Rams decided he was better suited to outside linebacker and sent him to the Scotland team in NFL Europe, where he made the switch to strongside linebacker. "I was doing well, actually playing," he says. But he tore a biceps and returned to the United States to rehabilitate the injury.

He would have had a job with the Rams the next season had he been healthy. But a neck problem led to his release. He subsequently returned to Scotland on his own, as a "non-allocated" player.

His first time there, he had been "allocated" by St. Louis.

He took one final shot at the NFL, signing with the Atlanta Falcons. But during a month of training camp, the neck problem persisted and he realized there was "not much left."

Doctors told him he was wise to quit while he was ahead.

Hesse attributes the NFL teams' willingness to give him a chance, in part, to former Cornhusker defensive coordinator Charlie McBride, "one of the few college coaches they respected because he was always honest with their coaches," Hesse says. McBride would tell the NFL coaches, "This guy might not be the best athlete, but this is the kind of guy you want on your team.' "

Whenever he reported, "teams told me, 'We're happy you're here,' " says Hesse. "The reason I kept getting picked up was that the teams liked character. I owe a lot of jobs to Charlie McBride."

Though finally giving up football was difficult, "I was pretty honest with myself," Hesse says. "I always thought I was going to get cut after every practice."

He also had prepared himself for the day it would end. He had a psychology degree in hand during his final season at Nebraska and had worked in internships related to what he is doing now with A.G. Edwards. "I knew I was going to do this," he says. "I had everything set up."

As with all former Cornhuskers from his time, he is often asked what it was like playing for Osborne. He always recounts the story about being on the elevator with the walk-on.

"Coach Osborne, there aren't many people around like him. He really does things the right way," says Hesse. "He always had people moving in the right direction." ■

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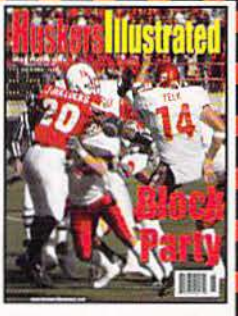

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Visitors Enjoy NU Experience

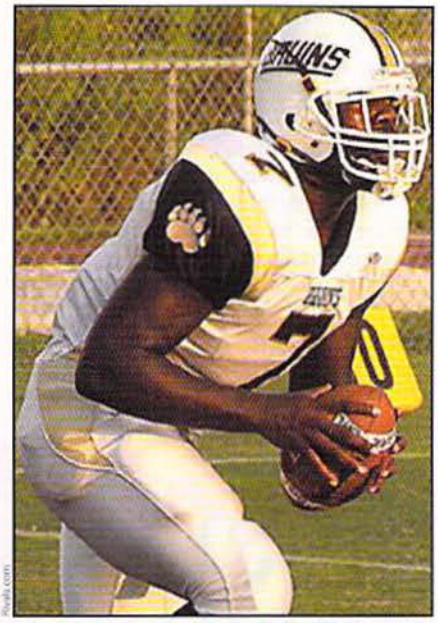
Junior college defensive tackle Smith commits to play for Huskers in 2004

By Doug Horwich

Nebraska had its first "blockbuster" recruiting weekend of the season recently, as a number of the nation's top prospects visited Lincoln during the weekend of the Kansas State game.

While the game didn't go as well as the Husker staff would have liked, the program did manage to make a good impression on the recruits who visited.

One thing that every coaching staff in the college game fears is losing a game during a big recruiting weekend. Losses are not consistent with the positive atmosphere that a team tries to display to visiting recruits. Additionally, the mentality of the team's players after a loss — many of whom are hosting visiting recruits — is perhaps not as upbeat as it would be after a victory.



Running back/defensive back Sirdarean Adams of Bradenton, Fla., was one of the visitors Nov. 14-15.

However, losses are also open to varied interpretations among recruits. Some will view a loss as a strike against a program, while others will opportunistically see a chance to contribute early at their given position on a team that needs help.

In 1998, Husker reserve I-back Robin Miller visited during the weekend of the team's loss to Texas. Despite the loss, Miller was impressed by the team's resilient attitude and the way in which they came together in defeat. He accepted a Husker scholarship offer shortly thereafter.

The Nov. 14 weekend has already produced an oral commitment in the form of junior college defensive tackle Byron Smith (6-foot-2, 295 pounds, 5.0-second 40-yard dash time) from Kilgore Community College in

NEBRASKA COMMITMENTS FOR 2004

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Lance Brandenburgh	Overland Park, Kan. (St. Thomas Aquinas)	6-1	215	LB
Andy Christensen	Bennington, Neb.	6-3	275	DT
Allan Evridge	Papillion, Neb. (Papillion-LaVista)	6-1	205	QB
Mike Huff	Ralston, Neb.	6-5	300	OL
Michael Keenan	Kansas City, Mo. (Oak Park)	6-2	220	LB
Maurice McClellan	Pawcatuck, Conn. (Stonington)	6-3	210	ATH
D.T. McDowell	Tucker, Ga.	6-1	190	QB
Terrence Nunn	Houston, Texas (Cypress Falls)	6-0	185	WR
Seth Olsen	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North)	6-5	300	OL
Clay Sievers	Elkhorn, Neb.	6-4	220	TE/LB
Byron Smith	Kilgore, Texas	6-2	295	DT
Ty Steinkuhler	Lincoln, Neb. (Southwest)	6-3	235	DE
Nathan Swift	Hutchinson, Minn.	6-3	190	WR

Kilgore, Texas.

Smith is a player who is mature enough to step in next year and fill the void left by Ryon Bingham, who will leave after this season for a chance at a professional career.

Another top defensive lineman who visited during the weekend of the Kansas State game is Greyson Gunheim (6-6, 240, 4.6) from Analy High School in Sebastopol, Calif. Gunheim is one of the top defensive end prospects in the country this year and a top priority of the Husker staff.

Gunheim enjoyed his visit to Lincoln. "I got back about 11 this morning (Monday)," Gunheim said, "My father went with me. We got in about 4:30 Saturday morning. Coach (Scott) Downing was there to pick us up. We talked about football and my game a little. We went straight to the hotel. Later that morning, we went over to the stadium. We talked to the coaches and were shown around the facilities. We were with our hostess and Coach Downing a lot."

Despite the loss, Gunheim was impressed by the atmosphere and electricity in the stadium. "The game was crazy," he said. "All the fans in red and everything; they are really supportive of their team. The tunnel walk is crazy.

"On Sunday we went to church. I met with the trainer and the nutritionist, academic advisor and the tutors. They make sure you stay up on all of your classes. They don't let you get behind. I got to go up in the skybox. Their facility upgrades are going to be real nice."

Gunheim said his father was also impressed by what he saw in Lincoln. "He liked it a lot," Greyson said. "He was amazed by all of the fans."

Although Gunheim enjoyed his visit to Lincoln, he does intend to visit USC and perhaps one or two more schools before making a final decision. For the time being, however, the Huskers appear to be in a good position.

"It (Nebraska) would be pretty high up there," he said. "I really liked it. I was thinking about committing. I want to visit some other schools though. Right now, it is Nebraska. I think that I'm going to go visit USC though."

Also in attendance that weekend was running back/defensive back Sirdarean Adams (6-foot, 200, 4.4)

RECRUITING NOTES

Recruits Still Like Huskers

By Rick Shaw

A group of high-profile football recruits were in Lincoln to witness Nebraska's 38-9 loss to Kansas State on Nov. 15. Despite the Huskers' disappointing showing on the field, the Nebraska coaches were able to make some positive strides in their recruiting efforts.

Byron Smith, a 6-foot-2, 295-pound defensive tackle from Kilgore Junior College in Kilgore, Texas, became the Huskers' 13th known commitment in its 2004 recruiting class. Rated as a three-star prospect by Rivals.com, Smith chose Nebraska over offers from Florida and Texas A&M.

"I grew up on Nebraska football," Smith said. "Tommie Frazier was my favorite player. I met him Sunday before I left Lincoln. I watched him as a kid, and it was cool to get the chance to meet him in person.

"I knew that if Nebraska offered, I was going to go there. Nothing is going to change my mind."

Smith boasts the athleticism to make an immediate impact on the Husker defense. The blue-chip defensive lineman can bench press 315 pounds 13 times. He also squats 635 pounds. In addition, he has been timed in a cat-quick 4.86 seconds in the 40-yard dash and has a 4.21-second shuttle time.

As a freshman, Smith tallied 62 tackles and 8 1/2 sacks. This season, he registered 85 tackles and 7 1/2 sacks.

Kilgore Coach Jimmy Rieves compared Smith to one of his former pupils . . . current Nebraska weakside linebacker starter Demorrio Williams.

"Byron is like Demorrio Williams was at his position," Rieves said. "He is always playing in our opponent's backfield. He is that quick off the ball. You try to single block him, and he is going to be in the backfield all night long."

In addition to gaining Smith's commitment, Nebraska made good headway with a few of its other top prospects in town for visits.

"It went very well," Rivals.com's No. 5-rated cornerback prospect Cortney Grixby said. "The coaches were real genuine, and they have the tradition and everything. It was a '10.' I loved it!"

Grixby, a 5-9, 175-pound defensive back from Central High in Omaha, Neb., admitted that his visit to Nebraska may provide him the necessary information to make his college choice.

"I've already visited Iowa," Grixby said. "That was a good visit, too. I'd give it a 9. I'm not sure if I'll take anymore visits. It's getting the time to make a decision, and it could be soon."

Sirdarean Adams of Bayshore High in Bradenton, Fla., had Michigan State in the lead before his visit to Lincoln. The 6-foot, 230-pound running back now lists the Huskers as his No. 1 option.

"I had a better time at Nebraska than I did at Michigan State," Adams said. "I got to hang out with all the football players. They are all like one up there. I'd rate the Michigan State visit an 8 and the Nebraska visit a 10.

"They tried to get me to commit, but I'm not ready to right now. I want to take some more visits and then weigh my options. Right now, my top five is Nebraska, Michigan State, Miami, Georgia and Ohio State." ■

from Bayshore High School in Bradenton, Fla.

Adams' list of favorites includes Nebraska, Michigan State, Miami and Georgia. He was hosted by close friend Fabian Washington, also a Bradenton native.

"I just got back," Adams said. "They sent a private jet for me, which was a first for me."

Like Gunheim, the loss did not ruin Adams' appreciation for game day in Lincoln.

"I was impressed a lot with the atmosphere, the fans, the coaching staff and the academic program they had up there," he said. "I talked to all the coaches. I especially liked talking to Coach Albin. I had an excellent trip!"

Adams spent much of the weekend with Washington, who was very positive about his experience in Lincoln. "He likes it a lot up there," Adams said. "He says it's a real nice place. You have to be focused on what you're doing though. I saw everything they had up there. There's nothing they had that I didn't see and Fabian didn't show me."

Having already visited Michigan State, Adams had a frame of reference for his visit to Lincoln.

Offensive tackle Taitusi "Deuce" Lutui of Snow College in Ephraim, Utah, enjoyed his visit to Lincoln.

"Nebraska was a little bit better," he said. "I had a better time there. I got to hang out with all the football players. They're all like one up there. At Michigan State, I only got to hang out with a couple guys. I didn't get the feel of the whole team."

Although the Husker staff would have loved to secure a commitment from this top athlete, Adams will continue to take visits before making a final decision.

"I'm also going to visit Miami, Georgia and Ohio State," he said.

Two years ago, the Husker staff was looking hard at offensive tackle Taitusi "Deuce" Lutui (6-5, 370, 5.4) from Mesa, Ariz. Lutui ended up committing to Utah but didn't qualify academically and ended up enrolling at Snow College in Ephraim, Utah.

Two years later, Lutui is now on track to be eligible for next season, and the Husker staff is once again pursuing his commitment. Lutui made a visit to Lincoln during the weekend of Nov. 14 and enjoyed the visit a great deal.

"I still feel good about them," Lutui said about Nebraska. "My thoughts haven't changed."

Lutui had a good visit to Nebraska, but the battle for his signature is far from over. He still intends to visit Southern California, as well as Kansas State, Boise State and Brigham Young.

Lutui's decision is likely to come as late as Signing Day. ■

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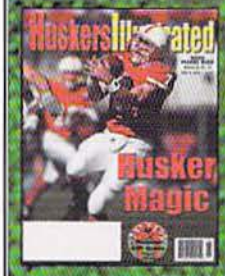

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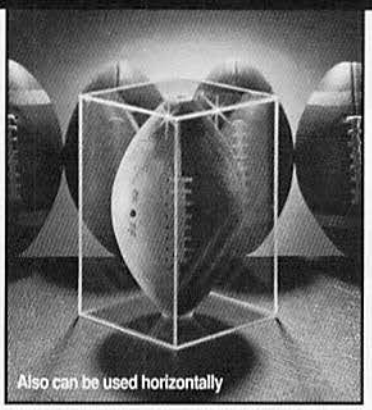

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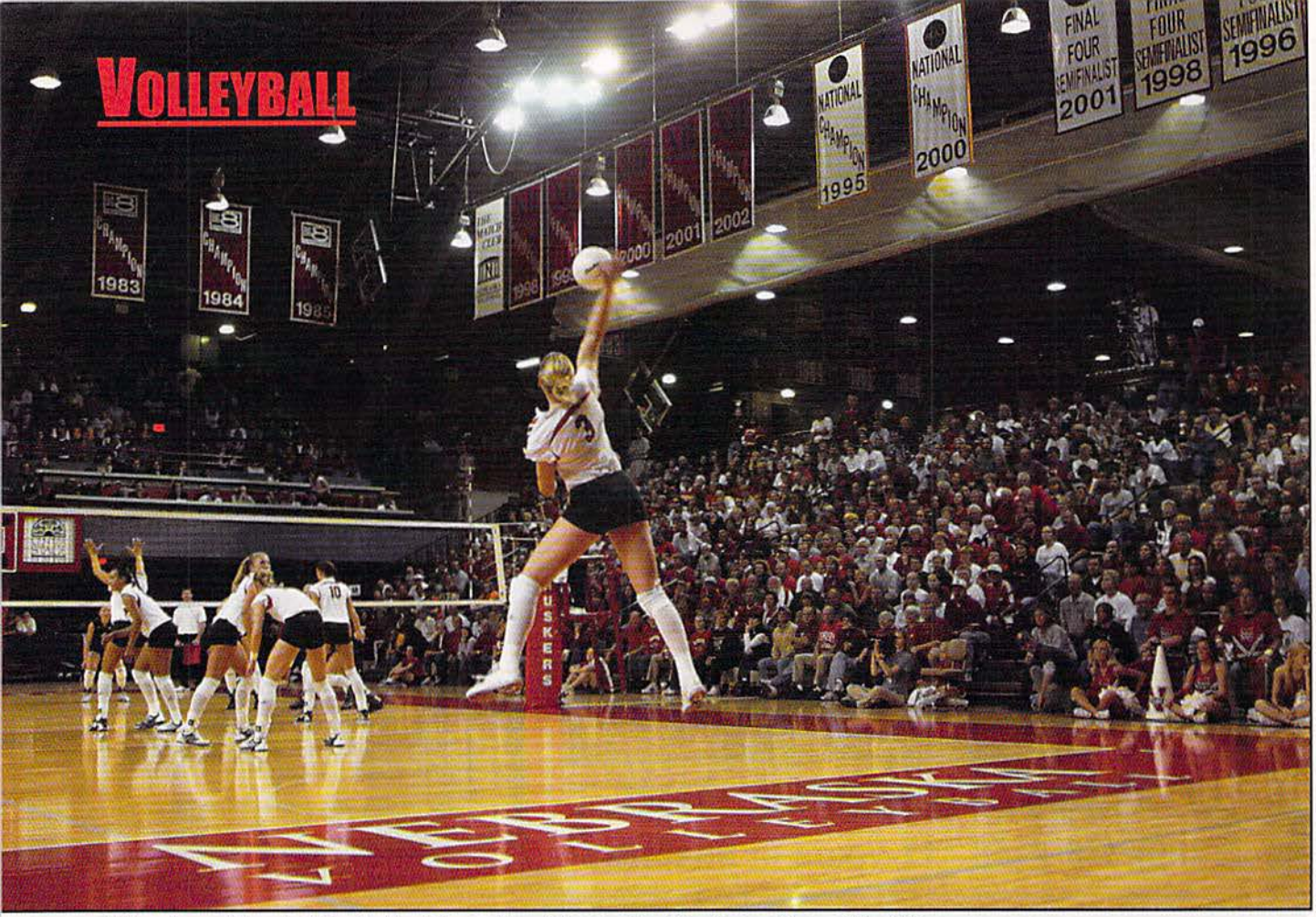

Nebraska could make it to the final four without leaving the friendly confines of the Coliseum.

No Waiting

Young Huskers hope to take advantage of having regional on their home court

By Todd Henrichs

For all that Nebraska's youngsters have been through this season, John Cook figures the lessons will pay off somewhere down the road.

Perhaps maybe in Dallas the weekend of the NCAA volleyball championships.

It's a wild idea for a team with five freshmen playing in key roles. A team that lost three times at home, ending a 54-match regular-season winning streak in Lincoln. A team that was swept by Kansas State, ending its string of 78 straight Big 12 Conference victories and five consecutive outright conference titles. A team that lost to Missouri for the first time in 21 years.

So why is there no, "Wait 'til next year," sentiment inside the Coliseum? Cook says tradition won't allow the Huskers to think about anything less than a title.

And the Huskers' head coach wouldn't have it any other way.

"These guys want to have a great season, and I'm going to continue to say that I still think we can be a final-four team," he said. "We're going to learn from these situations and be better for it."

Nebraska does have one big advantage heading into the postseason, the rare luxury of a four-loss team to advance to the final four without ever leaving home.

Way back in February, Nebraska was one of four sites chosen to host regionals in the first year of an experiment by the NCAA Division I Women's Volleyball Committee to award sites in advance of the tournament. The Huskers will not be the highest-seeded team in Lincoln, but it's possible they could avoid the

only three dominant teams in the collegiate game this season.

Hawaii and Florida, like Nebraska, play host to regionals, and top-ranked Southern California, the defending national champion, is likely to be sent to the fourth regional site at nearby Long Beach State.

"From there you could take the next 20 teams and flip a coin on any given night who could win," Cook said. "There is a lot of parity in college volleyball. It's simply a matter of playing well on the regional weekend."

Nebraska's first task is to get through the tournament's first and second rounds to be around for the regional, no easy step for a team that's struggled with consistency throughout the regular season.

Georgia Tech was the first to knock off the Huskers, but panic didn't set in until back-to-back NU losses at home to Kansas State and Missouri. All went five games with Nebraska's chances harmed by repeated hitting errors.

Nebraska still had a chance to share the Big 12 title but lost the rematch with Kansas State in Manhattan. It ended an eight-match winning streak in which the Huskers had knocked off nationally ranked Northern Iowa, Texas A&M and Missouri in the same week.

One of Nebraska's biggest victories came off the court when Sarah Pavan, one of, if not the most sought-after recruit out of high school this year, signed a national letter-of-intent with the Huskers in mid-November. Recruited out of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, Pavan is a 6-foot-5 right-side player who swings left-handed, drawing immediate comparisons to former Husker All-Americans Nancy Metcalf and Lisa Reitsma.

Pavan already has international experience with the Canadian National Team, having played in the 2003 World Grand Prix at age 16. She is expected to make an immediate impact for the Huskers next season.

"Our goal every year is to compete for the national championship," Cook said, "and you've got to have players that can do things at a very high level. Sarah is one of those. This certainly gives us the opportunity to compete for a national championship for the next four years."

Pavan, in turn, said having so many great young players in the program helped to attract her to Nebraska. True freshmen Dani Busboom, Dani Mancuso, Christina Houghtelling and Amanda McCormick have all started at different times throughout their first season. Redshirt freshman Kelsey Fautsch and sophomores Melissa Elmer, Jennifer Saleaumua and Michelle Lynch all play key roles.

In fact, Elmer and Saleaumua are likely to be the two Huskers considered for All-American honors.

Undoubtedly there are great things ahead for the young group, and preferably sooner than later, Busboom said. Making it to the final four would help everyone to forget the streaks that Nebraska lost this season.

"All we can do is go up now, and I definitely think making it to the final four will overshadow anything we've done," Busboom said. "That's the ultimate goal for every team." ■

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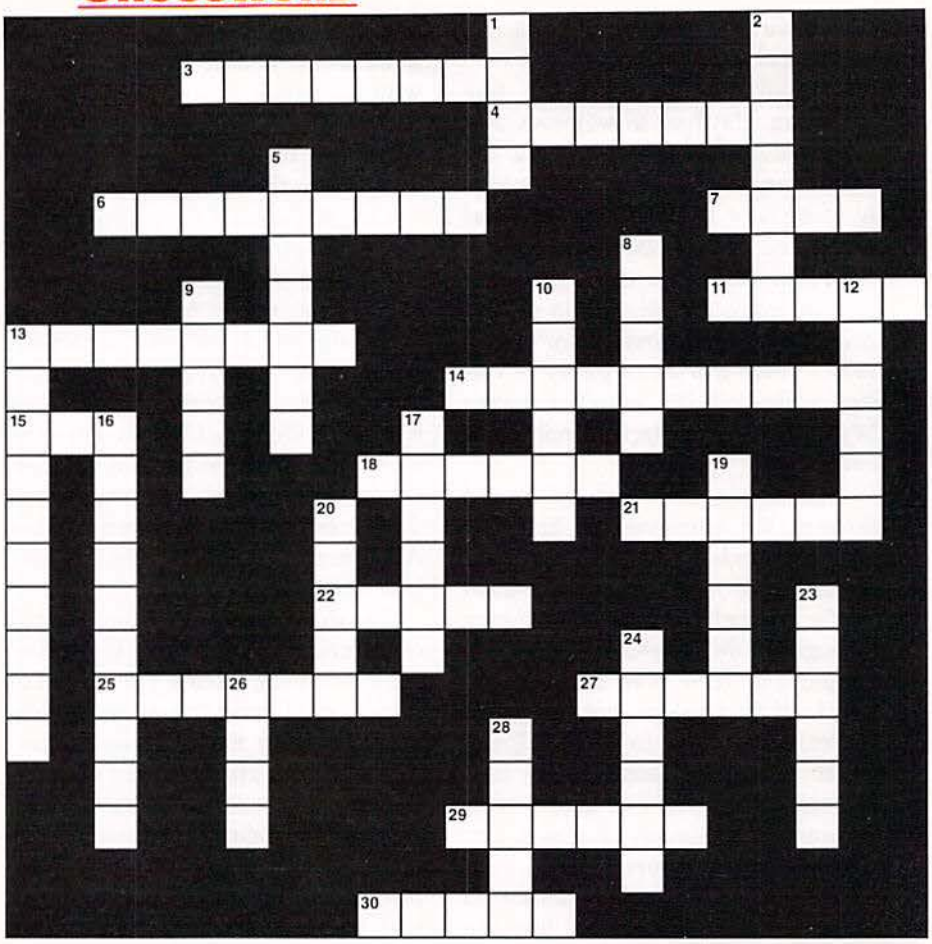

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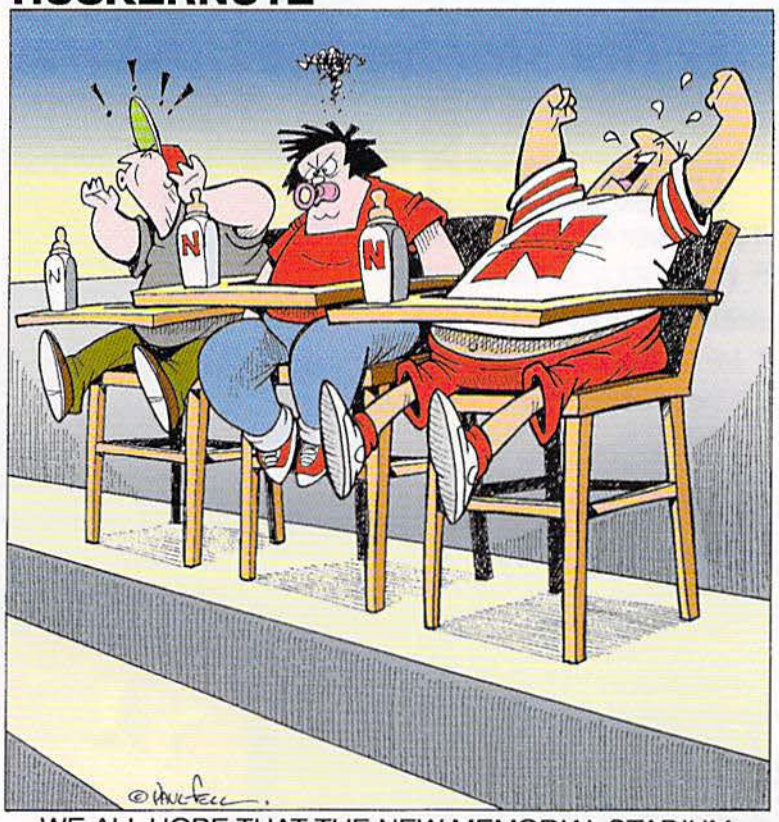

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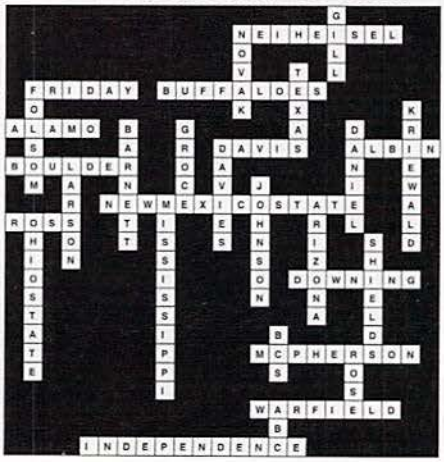

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High Expectations

Pederson says Nebraska won't surrender the Big 12 Conference to Oklahoma and Texas

Mike BABCOCK

BENARD THOMAS STOOD, arms crossed, stern demeanor, intent, as Athletic Director Steve Pederson announced that Frank Solich would not longer be Nebraska's football coach.

The junior defensive end was among several players who attended the news conference on the Sunday following the Colorado game. Among the others were Jammal Lord, T.J. Hollowell, Demorrio Williams, Jerrell Pippens, Dan Vili Waldrop, Lornell McPherson and DeAntae Grixby.

More than a dozen television cameras recorded the proceedings, and provided live coverage, along with radio stations and reporters from the print media, from as far away as Kansas City.

When Pederson opened the news conference to questions, Thomas stepped in. He wanted to know what Pederson saw for next season. "We don't know, Benard," Pederson replied.

"We can't look into a crystal ball and tell what's going to happen. But what we'll try to do is find the right head football coach and move the program forward."

Beyond stating what everyone already knew, that the Solich era was at an end, Pederson's purpose was to push the program forward, to encourage Nebraskans to close ranks, to set aside differences and look to the future. His decision to replace Solich would draw criticism, he said.

But, he added, "Nebraska is a great place, and the history and tradition of Nebraska will overcome all those things. Nebraska is bigger than anybody, any one of us that's here."

Athletic Director Steve Pederson left no doubt who was in charge.

Even so, Pederson left no doubt about who was in charge.

"This athletic department is not run by committee," he said. "It's not influenced by anybody from the outside, and we will make the decisions that we believe are in the long-term best interests of our student-athletes and our fans. I made this decision because I believe that it was in the long-term best interests of Nebraska football. And that's the only reason I made the decision."

Because of his silence regarding Solich's job status, following lopsided losses to Texas and Kansas State, there was a growing perception that big-money boosters were influencing him. That perception was reinforced by newspaper stories quoting anonymous sources.

With a $40 million fund-raising drive to improve athletic facilities in full swing, Pederson said he had been traveling across the state, discussing the project and mustering support.

Some donors told him they knew he had difficult decisions to make.

"But nobody's ever put me on the spot," he said. "Nobody has offered a donation with strings attached because I think they know enough about me to know I wouldn't take it anyway. The quickest way to get your check slid right back across the desk is to put strings on it."

The emotion in his voice punctuated his words.

"That's not how we run this program," he said. "That's not how we run this university."

He was similarly passionate in talking about the future of the football program. "We will not surrender the Big 12 Conference to Oklahoma and Texas," he said.

Nebraska should "play at the highest level of this league. When you play at the highest level of the Big 12, you have a chance to win the national championship. Nebraska has been among the elite programs in the conference, and we need to be among the elite programs in this conference."

The past two seasons, that hasn't been the case. Where do the Cornhuskers fit in the scheme of things? "We should be fitting with Oklahoma and Texas," he said.

"We look forward to being in that elite echelon. I think the players on this team and every player who's played here before agrees with that, that we're not a win-at-all-costs program. But the by-product in every area of your program is winning. And I don't apologize for having high expectations.

"I think that high expectations are part of a great university. They're part of a great athletic program, and the most disappointing thing you can ever deal with are no expectations."

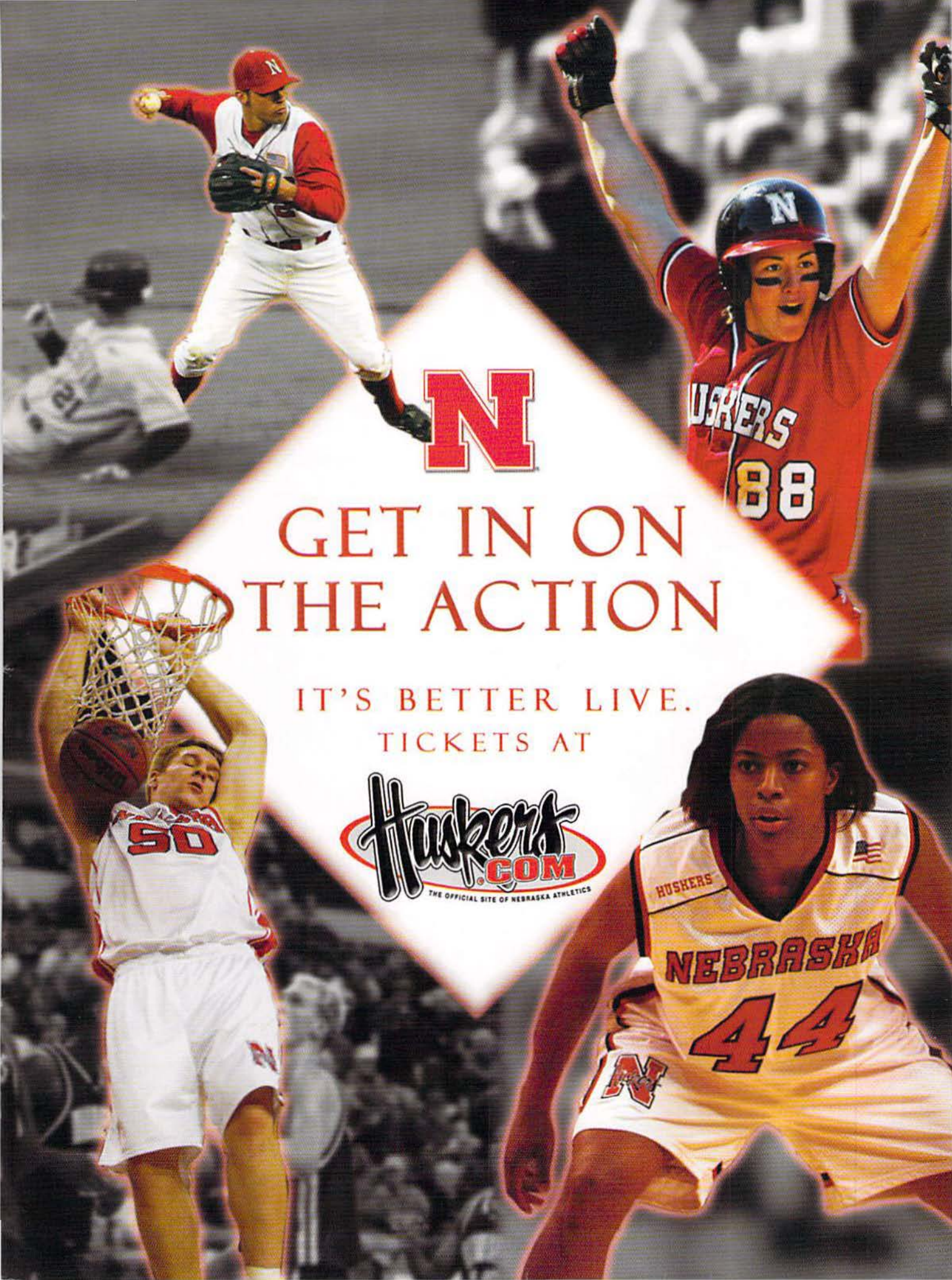
It will be in the context of those high expectations that the search for Solich's replacement will occur. "I would say this is the best job in the country," Pederson said. "And anybody who doesn't want to win the national championship shouldn't bother applying for this job.

"I understand that we are not going to win the championship every year, but I believe we should be playing for or gaining on the championship on a consistent basis."

Thomas and the other players had come mostly in support of Solich. But those who will return next season also have a vested interest in the results of Pederson's search.

The bottom line is the players, the student-athletes.

"My focus, my effort, my concentration — and that of the rest of the staff — is to look out for the players, to make sure things are done in the correct way for them," said Bo Pelini, the defensive coordinator turned interim head coach. "That's where all my efforts are right now." ■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